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ABSTRACT

In deciding what grammar should be taught, teachers of English as a second language can notice and record common errors (goofs) made by their students. It is possible to expose all types of goofs, state the rules to correct them, acquaint the teacher with the types of goofs made by persons from all over the world, and give them the grammar necessary to understand and handle them. A hierarchy of goofs can be established by taking sentences with numerous errors and determining which error, when corrected, does the most to make the sentence comprehensible. The most important goofs should be corrected first, one at a time. As a consequence, the speaker can be understood, even if his English isn't perfect. The pervasiveness of aspects of English grammar should also be considered when deciding what to teach. (VM)

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# GOOF ANALYSIS IN ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE[1]

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There has been a boom of English as a Second Language teaching materials and methods meant to guide teachers of English as a Second Language. There are three general assumptions about materials and methods we will discuss. First, most of the methods and materials assume that a major aim in teaching is to get the students to speak flawless English. Second, most of the materials use English itself as the point of departure, where the grammar of English determines the order of presentation (from simple to difficult). Third, the overwhelming majority of methods implicitly or explicitly suggest that all student errors be corrected with equal vigor.

None of these ideas seem to help teachers or learners, especially where the learners are adults (over 12 years old) and already know a little English, though imperfectly.

Q. WHY DON'T THESE METHODS HELP TEACHERS VERY MUCH?

A. English as a Second Language teachers spend a good part of their time learning the rules of English grammar; but knowing the rules is not enough. They do not help teachers anticipate the many kinds of mistakes (goofs) he will hear. Since incorrect sentences far outnumber correct ones, teachers should have some idea of what to expect, so they can concentrate on handling the goofs likely to be heard. In addition, teachers have little to guide them in de-

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[1] This paper is based on Burt and Kiparsky, The Gooficon forthcoming MAY [redacted] 1972, Newbury House Publishers, Rowley, Massachusetts. Lecture presented at Harvard University, October 1971.

termining which kinds of goofs are most important to correct, since all goofs must presumably be gotten rid of. But if he tries to correct all of them, many goofs remain, both bad ones and superficial ones.

Q. WHAT GRAMMAR SHOULD TEACHERS LEARN?

A. Before teaching a thing, teachers can listen to their students' broken speech for a while, and make a record of the kinds of goofs their students make so the teachers will know what their students have to learn about English grammar.

For example what muOt students learn if they say things like: (This is taken from The Gooficon, Burt and Kiparsky to appear January 1972.)

1. Is one oil company in Mexico.
   Are too many people here.
   Is nice that you are here.

2. We too big for the pony.
   John tall.
   My sisters very pretty.

3. I bought in Japan.
   Did John slap?
   My father been so fortunate. Hold a big post in the government.

4. Because cannot enter in your course in January, I decide to apply for the Fall term.
   My friend said that if not take this bus we are late for school.
   He worked until fell over.

5. Slept Rip Van Winkle 20 years.
   Escaped the professor from prison.
   (These were intended as statements.)

6. English use many countries.
Girl Pramilla biting doggie.
A strange president has chosen our country.

7. Do I must take an entrance exam?
Why don't you can send me two pounds?
Never do you must spit like that.
Why we bow to each other?
How Americans dress themselves?

8. I practice not religion.
He writes not good books.

9. Why did he went?
Does she likes it here?

10. I have impressed with Plato.
John gone. He sent to New York.

11. Do you surprise me?
Call your mother--she's worrying you.
The cat is sitting on the dinner table but he doesn't bother that.
And physical geography prefer me more than anything else.
I was boring with his speech.
Tell me what you are disgusting in.
John makes me to boring.

And there are many, many more goofs of all kinds.

Q. WHAT DO YOU DO AS A TEACHER IF YOUR STUDENTS SAY THINGS LIKE THIS? WHAT DO YOU DO, FOR EXAMPLE, TO EXPLAIN AND CORRECT THE SENTENCES IN GROUP "9."?

A. In English, there is only one tensed word per clause, and it is the first verbal word in the clause.

Q. WHAT ABOUT GROUP "5."?

A. In English, word order is subject-verb-object in almost all affirmative

clauses, not verb-subject-object. (Although there are some exceptions, this is the general rule to teach persons having word order trouble.

The purpose of exposing all these goofs and stating, wherever possible, the rule to fix it, is to acquaint the teacher with the type of goofs made by persons from all over the world, and to give them the grammar necessary to understand and handle them, with no excess baggage. Of course, all students don't make all goofs, so teachers can simply look through the goof types (in The Gooficon) to see what kind his students make and then he can concentrate on the grammar necessary for those. Otherwise, he should listen to his students' speech for a while, and make notes of the goofs they make, so he can concentrate on those.

Q. WHAT SHOULD TEACHERS CORRECT?

A. Rather than correcting all goofs with equal vigor, we suggest the worst goofs be fixed first, and the less important ones later.

Q. WHAT ARE BAD GOOFS?

A. If your student says:

A. English language use much people

or

B. Because the harvest be good, rained a lot.

The goofs are:

A. i. Article the is missing before English language.

ii. Much should be many

iii. Word order is wrong. The present subject and object must be interchanged.

B. i. Be should be was.

ii. Subject it missing before rained.

iii. Because is attached to the wrong clause.

We call the first two goof types (i. and ii.) in "A." and "B." local, because they are minor goofs within clauses. And the third goof type (iii.) in "A." and "B." are called global, because they are major (word order) goofs within a clause, or major goofs between clauses, such as attaching the conjunction to the wrong clause.

Q. WHAT HAPPENS IF WE CORRECT LOCAL OR GLOBAL GOOFS?

A. If we fix just the local goofs in "A." we have:

The English language use many people.

Q. WHAT ABOUT JUST CORRECTING THE GLOBAL GOOF?

A. Just the global goof correction gives:

Much people use English language.

which is much easier to understand than the sentence with both local goofs corrected.

Q. WHAT ABOUT THE LOCAL GOOFS IN "B."?

A. There are also two local goofs in "B.". If we correct them, we get:

Because the harvest was good, it rained a lot.

Q. THAT'S STILL NOT VERY GOOD. WHAT ABOUT THE GLOBAL GOOF?

A. If we correct it alone, we have:

The harvest be good because rained a lot.

And this is much easier to understand than the sentence with both local goofs fixed.

Q. SO WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

A. Correct the most important goofs first, one at a time, and only those. Then, the new English speaker can at least be understood, even if his English isn't perfect.

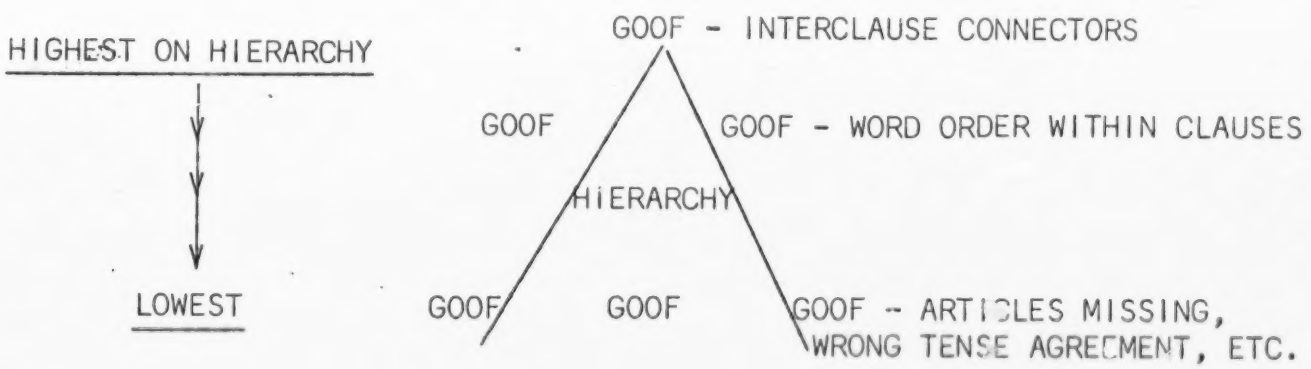
Q. HOW DOES A TEACHER DETERMINE WHAT GOOFS ARE MOST IMPORTANT TO CORRECT?

A. We suggest the hierarchy. To see what is meant by hierarchy, take any sentence or paragraph riddled with goofs, correct one at a time, holding the rest of the goofs the same, and see which goof when corrected, does the most to make the sentence comprehensible.

Q. IS THERE ANY GENERAL GUIDE TO DETERMINE WHAT KINDS OF GOOFS ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN OTHERS?

A. Yes. One guide is the global-local distinction. For example, goofs between clauses like placement, absence, or wrong subordinate conjunctions,

are more important to h8ve right for comprehension purposes than word order goofs within a clause; but word order within clauses is more important than presence or absence of determiners or correct subject-verb agreement. So we might diagram this information like so:




Q. HOW DOES A TEACHER USE THIS INFORMATION?

A. Because the hierarchy exposes and defines the goofs that make the sentence(s) hardest to understand, it can guide the teacher in determining which kind of goofs to correct first before the lesser goofs are worried about. Interestingly enough, many people have noticed that little goofs (local) persist much longer than important ones. Sometimes local goofs never disappear, despite endless drilling so that correcting the worst goofs first seems to be a natural way for learners to proceed.

Q. OTHER THAN THE HIERARCHY, WHAT OTHER CRITERIA DETERMINE WHAT TO TEACH?

A. The parts of English that are most pervasive throughout its structure and use are certainly important for students to learn. The complement system is an example since it is often involved as soon as two or more clauses are strung together.

(that clause) He hopes that is going to USA soon.

(infinitive ) I want to seeing you happy.

( gerund ) I didn't see him to putting out the dog.

The complements are the marked off clauses (really remnants of full clauses). Here, they are simply misformed. Students must learn that that clauses are finite, so there must be a subject present. Infinitives are naked verbs (with no endings or prefixes) preceded by the preposition to. And gerunds are formed by just adding ing to the end of the verb.

Q. WHAT OTHER KINDS OF GOOFS DO STUDENTS MAKE WITH COMPLEMENTS?

A. Sometimes, students choose the wrong complements altogether. For example: He believes to kiss her soon.

He wants that he will go to the USA soon.

Q. HOW CAN YOU TELL WHAT COMPLEMENT TYPE TO USE?

A. To help choose, we must distinguish between propositions and actions. A proposition is a statement making a claim that can be true or false like: I believe Tom has a color television.

where the proposition Tom has a color television may be described as true or false.

Q. WHAT KINDS OF VERBS DO PROPOSITIONS FOLLOW?

A. The verbs propositions follow (believe, in our example) are verbs of

mental action. Others are: think, claim, doubt, regret, notice, ignore, and other predicates that express judgments about the truth or falsity of the propositions, such as be true, false, likely, obvious, etc.

Q. WHAT FORM DO PROPOSITIONAL COMPLEMENTS COME IN?

A. Usually, that clauses, i.e. full, finite clauses.

Q. WHAT ABOUT ACTION COMPLEMENTS?

A. Action complements are not describable in terms of truth or falsity--it is not possible to describe the underlined complement in:

I want to go as true or false.

Q. WELL, WHAT FORM DO ACTION COMPLEMENTS COME IN?

A. Typically, they come in gerund or infinitive form. For example:

I regret kicking him. (gerund)

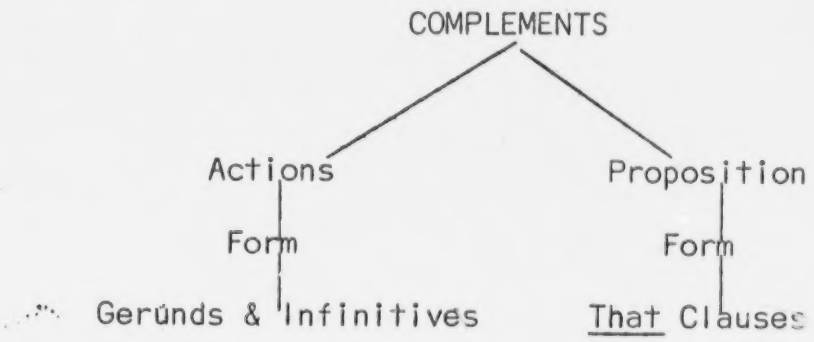
She wants to go. (infinitive)

Q. WHAT KINDS OF VERBS DO ACTION COMPLEMENTS FOLLOW?

A. They follow verbs like: want, force, promise, request, stop, persuade, bribe -- which are not usually verbs of mental action.

Q. SO NOW WE HAVE TWO WAYS TO DESCRIBE COMPLEMENTS, RIGHT?

A. Yes, Like so:




Q. GERUNDS AND INFINITIVES ARE NOT FULL CLAUSES, BUT REMNANTS, AREN'T THEY?

A. Yes.

Q. SO HOW DO YOU TELL WHICH ONE TO USE?

A. The answer lies in their meaning. We can compare the equivalent full clauses of gerunds to infinitives in a table like so:

| MAIN CLAUSE | SIMILAR MEANING THAT CLAUSE | INFINITIVE | GERUND |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |

If we take four sentences with action complements, we can fit them in the chart like this:

i. He has decided to go.
ii. He intends to leave.

iii. He regrets kissing her.
iv. He remembers seeing her.

| MAIN CLAUSE | SIMILAR MEANING THAT CLAUSE | INFINITIVE | GERUND |
|---|---|---|---|
| He has decided | | To go | * |
| He intends | | To leave | * |
| He regrets | | * | Kissing her |
| He remembers | | * | Seeing her |

Q. WHAT ARE THE ASTERISKS?

A. The asterisks are here to show what is not English. I.e. English speakers do not say:

* He has decided going.

* He intends leaving.

* He regrets to kiss her.

* He remembers to see her.

Q. WHAT ABOUT THE THAT CLAUSES?

A. Let's compare them to each other:

| MAIN CLAUSE | SIMILAR MEANING THAT CLAUSE | INFINITIVE | GERUND |
|---|---|---|---|
| He has decided | That he will go | To go | |
| He intends | That he will leave | To leave | |
| He regrets | That he kissed her | | Kissing her |
| He remembers | That he saw her | | Seeing her |

Q. SO THE DIFFERENCE IS THE TENSE OF THE SIMILAR MEANING THAT CLAUSES, ISN'T IT?

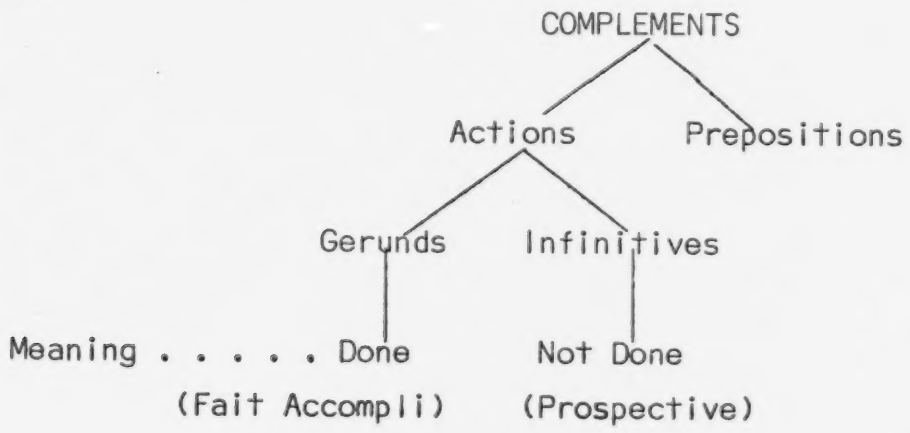
A. Right. Actions that come in infinitival form have a future (will) meaning to them. And actions that come in gerund form have a past tense (ed) associated with their meaning.

Q. IS THIS DIFFERENCE PREDICTABLE?

A. Yes -- by the meaning of the verb in the main clause. To decide to go, or to want to leave means the mental action took place before the still "prospective" action. Thus, its future meaning. And similarly with gerunds. The meaning of verbs like regret or remember is that the action described in the following complement has already happened. It is a fait accompli, and the verb expresses a reaction to that fait accompli.

Q. SO NOW WE HAVE A DIVISION WITHIN ACTION COMPLEMENTS?

A. Yes. So far:



Q. WHY ARE THE TENSES DELETED IN ACTION COMPLEMENTS?

A. Because they are predictable by the meaning of the main verb. Main verbs having complements whose actions have not yet taken place come in infinitival form, and complements whose actions are already done come in gerund form. The meaning is syntactically and economically expressed this way.

Q. DOES THIS KIND OF MEANING DIFFERENCE EXIST IN PROPOSITION COMPLEMENTS ALSO?

A. Yes. There are also two kinds of propositions. They are factive or non-factive (Kiparsky & Kiparsky, 1968). The propositions almost all come in finite <u>that</u> clause form, so on the surface they appear to be similar.

Q. HOW CAN WE TELL THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FACTIVE AND NON-FACTIVE PROPOSITIONS, THEN?

A. By their meaning. Although propositions are not characterizable by a time element the way actions are, factives are easily distinguishable from non-factives by whether a speaker takes the truth of a complement for granted or not.

Q. GIVE SOME EXAMPLES.

A. O.K. When you use a factive verb like <u>regret</u> or <u>notice</u>, you take it for granted that the complement is true. So compare:

A. John regrets that it happened

to a sentence with a non-factive verb like believe.

B. John believes that it happened

with "A.", not only John, but I (the speaker) believes that it happened. But with believe, I (speaker) could perfectly well say but it didn't happen.

Q. IS THERE ANY SYNTACTIC WAY THIS MEANING DIFFERENCE IS EXPRESSED?

A. Yes. Factive verbs, can take gerunds as complements and non-factives can take infinitives.[1]

Q. BUT MOST PROPOSITIONAL COMPLEMENTS ARE EXPRESSED BY THAT CLAUSES, AREN'T THEY?

A. Yes. But if they can appear as remnants, then factives take gerunds, and non-factives take infinitives.

Q. WHAT ARE SOME OTHER VERBS LIKE THIS?

A.

| FACTIVE | | NON-FACTIVE | |
|---|---|---|---|
| regret | reveal | say | suppose |
| resent | surprise | claim | presume |
| ignore | dismay | doubt | likely |
| forget | obvious | believe | true |
| remember | significant | announce | false |
| notice | | | |

[1] There is another difference, subject snatching. This is discussed in detail in The Gooficon, Chapter 5.

Q. HOW CAN THIS KIND OF INFORMATION HELP ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHERS?

A. Because goofs that are due to students' using the wrong complement type are common. For example:

I resent him to come home so late.

Did you want them looking oddly at each other?

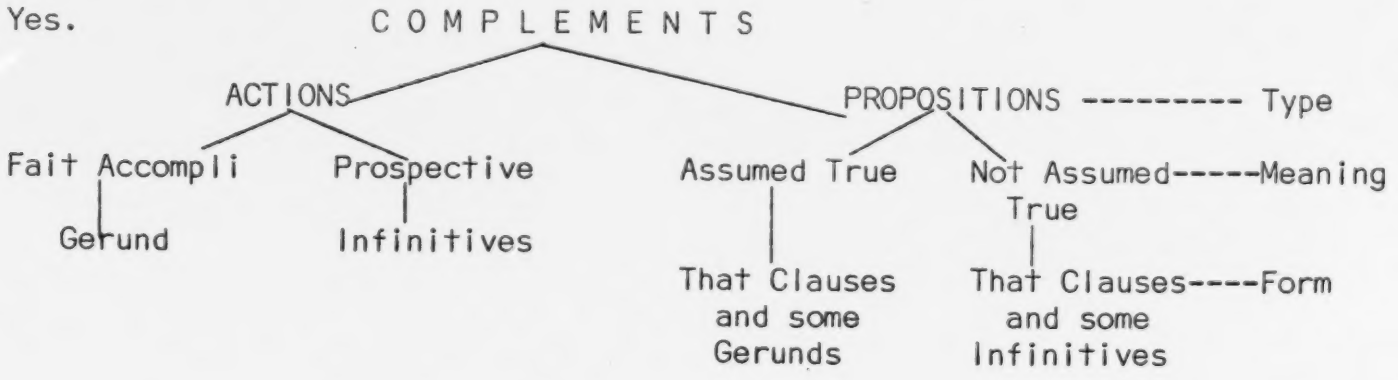
These can be explained and fixed if students learn the meaning of the main verbs.

Q. THERE SEEMS TO BE SOME THREAD OF SIMILARITY IN MEANING AND FORM BETWEEN ACTION COMPLEMENTS THAT ARE "DONE", AND FACTIVE PROPOSITIONS WHICH ARE TAKEN FOR GRANTED TO BE TRUE, DOESN'T THERE?

A. Yes. And it's the same with prospective (not done) actions, where infinitives are used as complements, and non-factive verbs, where their complements are not assumed to be true, and whose complements sometimes show up as infinitives.

Q. CAN THIS BE ILLUSTRATED SIMPLY?

A. Yes.



Q. HOW CAN THIS INFORMATION HELP TEACHERS AND STUDENTS?

A. If teachers are familiar with this way of analyzing the complement system, it gives students some hope of learning this system more easily. Rather than being entirely unpredictable, complement choices are at least in part, predictable by the meaning of the main verb of the sentence in which they appear.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this paper has been (i) To show that the structure of English alone is not the starting point for teachers learning grammar. Instead, goofs foreign students actually make should serve as the point of departure for teachers to learn grammar. (ii) Some goofs are more important than others, and they should be attended to first while the others wait (correcting one goof at a time). (iii) That a hierarchy of goof types based on comprehensibility exists, and that one measure will include distinctions between interclause goofs, word order goofs within clauses, and article and agreement goofs. (iv) That the pervasiveness of parts of English grammar should also be considered when deciding what to teach.

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